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AUTHOR	Heath, Inez A.
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ABSTRACT

Social studies teachers should consider ways in which personal experiences can enhance their teaching of world events. As more and varied travel opportunities are made available to educators through work-study tours and educational organizations, so too are the possibilities for making the travel experience a resource that can be a "jumping-off" point for meaningful learning in the classroom. Finding interesting ways to share the travel experiences with students can be effective in motivating students to learn about events in history that are often seen as boring and irrelevant. The "what I did on my summer vacation" approach has proven to be of little value in motivating students to write and to expand knowledge about the places visited. By approaching travel as a "sensory experience" in which the teacher shares thoughts and insights, students become involved in the teacher's experience as a learner. Both the teacher and students share the experience and together they explore places unknown. In using the field journal approach, the teacher can elicit interest in geography, history, and culture and encourage students to enhance their global perspectives. The field journal entry that is used to illustrate the process is from a visit to the Dachau Memorial (Germany). Contains 8 references and 3 endnotes. (Author/BT)

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Inez A. Heath, Ph.D.
Associate Professor Social Studies and Multicultural Education
Department of Early Childhood and Reading
Valdosta State University
Valdosta, Georgia 31698
Phone and Voice Mail 912 333 5625
e-mail iheath@grits.valdosta.peachnet.edu

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The Teacher's Field Journal: Traveling to "Remember" History.

Social studies teachers should consider ways in which personal experiences can enhance their teaching of world events. As more and varied travel opportunities are made available to teachers through work-study tours and educational organizations, so too are the possibilities for making the travel experience a resource that can be a "jumping-off" point for meaningful learning in the classroom. Finding interesting ways to share the travel experiences with students can be effective in motivating students about events in history that are often seen as boring and irrelevant. The "what I did on my summer vacation" approach has proven to be of little value in motivating students to write and to expand knowledge about the places visited, however, by approaching travel as "a sensory experience": in which the teacher shares her thoughts and insight can help students become involved in the teacher's experience as a learner. Both teacher and students share the experience and together they are exploring places unknown. In using the field journal approach, the teacher can elicit interest in the geography, history and culture, encouraging students to enhance their global perspectives. . The field journal entry example, presented in this article, is from my visit to the Dachau Memorial.

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Inez A. Heath

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Inez A. Heath, Ph.D.
Associate Professor Social Studies and Multicultural Education
Department of Early Childhood and Reading
Valdosta State University
Valdosta, Georgia 31698
Phone and Voice Mail 912 333 5625
e-mail iheath@grits.valdosta.peachnet.edu

The Teacher's Field Journal: Traveling to "Remember" History

Several years ago a friend shared his account of a recent visit to Auschwitz with me. At first I was uncomfortable, wanting to avoid a subject that frightened me. However, as I listened I slowly became absorbed in the images and insights that were unfolding before us as he shared his travels. his perceptions, and his emotions regarding the impact of this experience on his life. Through his descriptions, I felt a sense of connection with this time period, and I was drawn to learning more about it. I found myself asking questions, and becoming more aware of the interrelationship between this dark period and other events, past and present.

By listening to my friend's account of his travels, I realized I was learning through a primary sources, of sorts: being with one who had, in a sense found the "ghosts" of history. Carpenter (1996) writes that our travels do not have to become entire teaching units, rather they can serve as a way to enrich learning. Arnold (1991) observed that history often seemed dull or meaningless to most students at the outset. The things we learn in our travels, can become the "jumping off" points for eliciting curiosity and interest in a subject like history.

The vicarious experience of learning through my friend's experience was unique and worth pursuing. I wanted to incorporate his informal style in my own teaching. It was only natural that my travels to southern Germany several years later, should include a visit to

Dachau. In planning the trip, I felt it necessary to reflect on my own learning experiences: the things that interested me and made me want to learn more.

Prominent on my mind was the recollection of slide shows of my former teachers' travels. In reflection, these were boring experiences, lacking imagination, often dwelling on obvious information that required no insight. One example I remember was seeing a slide of our teacher standing in front of a castle. The teacher only told us the name of the castle, instead of taking us on an "exploration" of the castle, to make us wonder about this place: to actively involve us in the experience. As the slides of unknown places were flashed before us, we felt removed from the experience: passive observers from another place and time. I realized that my travel experiences to Dachau should be a resource for students: to learn more about the Holocaust: an eexperience that was real and would bring about interest and appreciation of this historical event as ti related to other social sciences, as well.

Danks (1996) noted that history textbooks are often viewed by students as "...dry statement of facts held together with string, rather than the sinew of living human beings." (p 101). Danks (1995) found that most history texts were lacking in information about the Holocaust, and encouraged teachers to rely on documents and personal accounts along with reading fiction and poetry to help students develop a sense of this time period.

It is through our own experiences as teachers that we can inspire students to understand and learn about events in time, and the social and moral values that are integral to developing a true appreciation of history. Davis (1993) notes that in the process of developing moral thinking it is important to encourage students to commit themselves to constructive values and behaviors: that will foster self respect and the respect of others. Moral understanding becomes evident when we become active observers in time; as we examine our own values within historical

contexts.

Bringing the Travel Experience to the Students

Since field trips to far-away places to learn about the past are not a choice in most cases, teachers should think about other effective ways in which to bring their own travel experiences to life in the classroom. The reliance on a primary source: a person who has been there, as an observer, requires preparation, study and planning. Prior to the trip, I studied and read about Dachau and the Holocaust. I asked in-service teachers involved in teaching about this period in history to propose ideas about what they thought might be interesting to them and to their students. I decided that a detailed account of my experiences: a journal, could be an interesting way to enhance students' understanding of the rise of Nazi power in the 1930's. The journal entry would capture the things that I saw, what I was learning while on my visit, emphasizing the subjective rather than objective experience: exploring the affective domain. Instead of showing slikes with a few words, I wanted to use words enhanced by a few photographs.

One of the greatest problems evident in social science education is that students and many teachers, do not make the connections between economic, social, geographical, political and philosophical influences that affect historical events. In teaching about the Holocaust, for example, the interest of students usually tends to center on the horrors of the war, seldom moving beyond this to explore other events that are unfolding simultaneously. To counter this, I composed open-ended discussion questions based on the social science disciplines to help students make the connection between history, other social sciences and the humanities.

Additionally, it was important to consider past and present-day events which had similar characteristics, such as the conflict in the Balkins. Major and Nelson (1995) developed a classroom simulation activity which can provide insight for students learning about ethnic

conflicts. The ability to probe the issues and draw conclusions about the Holocaust can enhance the students' study of the Bosnian conflict as well as to broaden their understanding of slavery and genocide throughout history.

Harvey (1979) said that as teachers we have the responsibility of making students aware that genocide and human indignity is not a thing of the past, but rather a phenomenon that is with us today. It is a universal struggle and one which teachers must approach in a variety of ways in order for students to realize their responsibility as citizens of a world which they can collectively affect and change.

Through the teacher/s field journal lesson, we can explore temporality, the dimension of time: how time is perceived. The experience of visiting an historical site can give new meaning to our sense of temporality. It is "only" time that separates us from the event. In realizing this, the teacher can use the field journal to share her sense of personal involvement in history, and this experience of history can transform an event from an objective expeirnce in which only facts are important into a subjective experience: in which the student "remembers" the event along with the teacher. History IS a subjective experience.

Learning to deal with the subjective nature of history is important to Brakel (1995) who writes that when students understand and grasp the idea of history as biased, reflecting the limitations of the observer, they begin to appreciate both the pleasures and perils that are part of the study of history. Therefore, it is possible to explore events from our own view, provided we realize our responsibility as teachers to present information that is as accurate as possible, and that we set an example as learners by up-dating our knowledge base about the event. Through active involvement in the subject, we are examining the issues and then considering how history relates not only to our world but also to our students' world, as well. By personalizing history

through our own writing, we are allowing our students to become involved in an experience that is interesting and revealing. Danks (1996) writes that how we help students deal with the Holocaust really depends on who tells about it and how it is relayed to the students.

The teacher's field journal entry approach should include the development of rhetorical thought. Such thinking should encourage students to develop a holistic view of historical events. As social studies teachers, we are challenged to understand history, and to appreciate the responsibility we have to our students to present issues as clearly and objectively within our own reality. Thus, we are presenting ourselves as learners to our students.

Field Journal Entry:

> "All the struggle to learn when all we have to do is to remember".
> *(The Vedas)*[1]

June 16, 1996: The bright sun and scent of spring turning to summer in the mid-morning freshness, settled my uneasiness as I passed through the heavy iron gates that first opened in 1933.[2] To outsiders, it was a work camp for those who "endangered state security", but those living here knew that "work" was a metaphor for death. The place now in ruins was once an example of the efficiency of the Third Reich. Loud sounds, strong smells, pain and fear...now it is silent . My eyes move up and along the gray concrete block wall that surrounds the grounds. The wall is topped with jagged barbed wire that sharply cuts an ugly scar in a cloudless blue sky. My sandals crunch loudly on the white stones on white sand, covering consecrated ground: a cosmetic cleansing of a dark time in history.

For some time I have anticipated coming here, but my imagination could not prepare me for the experience of this day. Earlier this morning we drove around the quaint old town for which this camp was named. We were taken with the lovely cottages with bright flowers, and people walking and riding bicycles on paths by the road. There was no hint of the past: not even a sign to direct us to the camp. Were we in the right place, we wondered as we drove around the

town.

We asked for directions, but no one was "quite sure" where the camp was located. An elderly woman walking along the road with her grandson pointed ahead. We followed her directions and soon found ourselves driving on a farm road heading away from the town. We asked a man in front of a Bavarian cottage tending his roses. He gave us a strange look, and said he didn't know. Finally on our third try a woman, sweeping the sidewalk in front of her "Gasthaus" told us to turn at the crossroads and follow the small green sign that said, "Memorial Park".

We wondered about these people. Were they in denial, or were they just defending the place they know and love... a place much different than the images sent out after the war. Yet, these are the images that are still imprinted on the minds of many outsiders. Can we blame the townpeople for feeling defensive, especially when visitors like us, seem to eye them suspiciously? Don't the visitors realize that this town flourished long before it was marred by a brief but cruel encounter with history?

I try to erase this image as I think about the children playing far away from the camp walls and barbed wire. For many, their lives were only beginning when the place was built. Many had not even been born. The shadow that looms over their town: still darkens the world. We are all living in the shadow.

Sitting in Darkness

In a large bare auditorium filled to capacity with young and old, speaking many languages, we sit on wooden benches. I wonder: Who are all these people? Why am I here? A light switch snaps, the lights go out. The aging black and white film, worn by continuous showings, was shot here during the war. Still photographs of gaunt inmates led by Nazi soldiers, contrasted with pictures of healthy dogs lazily sleeping near doorways, are disturbing.

Sickly men too weak to walk, some wrapped in blankets, are being taken away in crude wooden carts. The grayness of winter accentuates the feeling of depression and despair. A man with a clipped monotonal voice from the newsreel era, tells about the humiliation of the sick prisoners. Some of the men seem to be in a trance as they walk around aimlessly, wearing striped pajama-like uniforms.

Groups of men, crowded in rooms stare out at the invisible man with the camera. Some

are shirtless, but they don't seem to mind the cold, as they look to us in the audience. But, we can only stare back. Bones and bodies hover together. Some are digging into large dented iron kettles. They hold primitive wooden utensils up to their mouths to savor whatever they are scraping up from the bottom. They ignore the grease, and the dirt that is part of the daily diet. Through the eye of the lens, their faces reveal momentary gratification.

The hollow sunken eyes in once young faces, aged abruptly after only a few months of humiliation, torture, hard work and harsh conditions, fill the screen. They were the youngest, the strongest, the brightest, the most productive, and creative, the idealists and liberals...the followers and the leaders. They were made to forget: deprived of their pride and dignity, their goals, their values, and ...their God.

The eyes silent and frozen on the screen stare out to us. I squirm in my seat.

The film has ended. Like silent silhouettes, the people pass through the doors on the right side of the auditorium...into the sunlight,. As the last of our group exits, the door in the back opens and another group enters.

Moving Through Time

I follow the sign to the barracks. Efficiency in construction was evident in the outward appearance of these buildings. Efficiency was the word. The smell of non-treated aged wood filled the air as I walked into the room. There were long rows of bunks separated by wooden boards stacked three high in this large room with a low ceiling. I imagined the men in the film sleeping there. Only a mal-nourished person slight in size and too weak to care, could tolerate such conditions: I moved into the next room. There were long work tables, where men sat on small wooden stools making ammunition for the war. Now they were neatly stacked on wooden lockers that lined the walls in the room.

Entering a hallway, I noticed that this room had been partitioned into three sections. In two areas men washed in cold water from wash fountains. There were: only two of these awkward-looking fixtures in each area for the growing numbers of people crowded into the building, as the war escalated. In another open area were the latrines. There was no privacy.

A few visitors walked ahead of me and two followed behind. There was a sense of uneasiness among us as we looked around the place. No one spoke, we all seemed to be deep in our own thoughts. We read the writing in three languages on the walls which told about each

room. During the war, there were several rows of barracks, identical to this one. In perfect symmetry, they lined a grand avenue where majestic cypress trees still grow. Outside the back window I could see the rows of white rectangular concrete foundations where the buildings once stood.

I moved to a small alcove. It was dark and I peered curiously into a room blocked off by a metal gate. The bunks in this room were even more crowded and tightly packed: the sleeping spaces even smaller. It would be difficult to move around in this room. It was dark and quiet and still.

Alone in the dim light I was absorbed by stale air. My eye caught the black sign with solid white capital letters, outside the window. The German spelling needed no translation: "KREMATORIUM" . An arrow pointed the way down the wide avenue lined with cypress trees. I felt a chill run down my spine and my senses peaked. I had crossed into another time. A strange oppressive feeling came over me. I looked around. The other visitors were gone, and I realized that I was alone. Panic, as if I might be lost forever in this bleak time, came over me. I found a side door and moved myself out. The brightness of the white pebbles on the expansive yard outside helped to relieve my anxiety, even as a single gray cloud covered the sun.

Walking toward the guard house, a group of American high school students approached. Their laughter and chatter ceased as their eyes moved upward to gaze at the walls and barbed wire. Their shoes crunched loudly on the white gravel on white sand.

"Those who cannot remember the past, are condemned to repeat it." [2]

From across an ocean, far from this time and place, they came with their teachers to learn about the Holocaust. Chance had brought us here together on this day in Dachau.. Unlike the children playing outside in the camp's shadows, ***we had made a conscious decision to go inside.*** We could remember and learn, but most importantly we were free to leave this time and place, to walk out through the iron gates, and to look forward in time.

Integrating the Social Sciences: Questions for Discussion:

Political Science: Why were the men in the camps considered to be a "danger" to their society and to the state?

Anthropology: What reasons did the Nazi's use to justify the superiority of the Aryan race over Jews and other ethnic groups?

Sociology From the writer's descriptions, what do you think life was really like among the prisoners? What kind of relationships did the prisoners have with each other?

Economics: The idea of "efficiency" was extremely important during the war. What are examples of efficiency described in the text, and how was efficiency reflected in the economic policies of Germany during this period? What was the role of these prisoners in the German economy?

History: How does Santayana's quote relate to today's world? Have we forgotten about the past? What is happening around the world, and how can we become involved in "remembering the past" and making this a better world?

Psychology: What thoughts and feelings did the journal writer experience as she walked through the barracks? What are ideas or words that you associate with this time period and how do these words affect you personally and emotionally?

Geography: Why do you think that the quaint village of Dachau was chosen as the site for the first Nazi "work camp"? What other locations were chosen for concentration camps in Europe? How was this camp different from others built later in the war.

Philosophy: Who are the children playing in the camp's shadows? What does it mean that we are "free... to walk out through the iron gates"? What does the quote from the Vedas mean in terms of learning about history?

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Endnotes

1. The Vedas- The Vedas were composed during the 1,000 years before the birth of Christ and were passed down through oral tradition. The word Veda means knowledge. They represent the teachings and philosophy the of Hindu religion.
(World Book Encyclopedia)

2. The primary resources on Dachau for the field journal came from my own observations, discussion with museum tour guides, descriptive narratives at the exhibits areas in the Dachau Memorial Museum and the museum publication: Barbara Distel and Ruth Jakush, Eds. (1979). Translation by Jennifer Vernon. *"Concentration Camp Dachau 1933-1945* published by Ciomite International da Dachau Brussels, Lipp, GmbH,Munich

3. George Santayana (1863-1952) professor, philosopher and poet. This quote from *The Life of Reason* (1922, New York) is written in bold print, on the last page of the museum resource book described above, published by the Comite International da Dachau